

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE
4 MAY 2022**

Officer: Helen Ball (Town Clerk)

TOWN RANGERS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update the Committee on the development of a Town Ranger Service

BACKGROUND

The Team Shrewsbury Reports of January and March 2022 have already raised the development of this project to the Recreation & Leisure Committee.

During 2021 the Town Council had to resort to commissioning security staff to address the increasing levels of anti-social behaviour in the Quarry. At times there was a heightened sense of unease in the park which was felt by every day users, local residents and staff. The Park was a regular patrol feature for the Police and it was the late afternoon and early evening time that were a cause for concern.

The Town Council commissioned a Security Company to make regular patrols between April and August and at its height 3 security staff were operating for upwards of 6 hours a day. The establishment of a core group of security staff helped to build relationships with youths carrying out ASB, local residents who were witnessing issues on their doorsteps, our staff and the Safe Neighbourhood Team to start to change the mood in the park and develop the feeling that people were welcome in the park but ASB would not be tolerated.

Security staff were given instructions to assess impact of moving individuals from the park and those potential displacement routes were also checked. In addition attendance in the park into the late evening allowed the Town Council to keep facilities like the public conveniences and the Dingle open longer. Town Council staff would ensure facilities were clean and tidy before clocking off and any cleansing issues resulting from later opening were addressed first thing the following morning.

At the same time the Business Improvement District were facing ASB issues within the town centre and they too appointed security staff independently of the Town Council with a similar remit to address petty ASB issues and develop a sense of presence and reassurance to those who frequented the town in the early afternoon and early evening.

As the nights drew in outside ASB issues reduced, but the Shopping Centres saw an increase in youth issues and they too sought to increase security personnel.

Both the Town Council and Shropshire Council Detached Youth Teams have kept a watching brief over these areas and have liaised with the School Pastoral Teams in an attempted to raise youth related issues.

CURRENT STAFFING POSITION

Over the last 2 years our town centre operatives have reported increasing levels of ASB and threats of violence that in times has increased to disorder affecting their ability to carry out their work. We have had staff assaulted by individuals under the influence of alcohol and substances and on two significant occasions staff were put on long-term sick leave to combat the trauma of events. This has put the whole of the town centre team in a sense of unease about locking up facilities on their own and we are finding it ever more difficult to redeploy operational staff to cover such challenging situations.

Whilst Neighbourhood Wardens have cover requirements in their remit, they also provide cover for the Market Hall, Public Conveniences, the Splash Park and the Park Warden and over the last two years of the pandemic the need to cover these roles have meant that their planned workload has suffered.

Sick leave of key staff continue to pose operational issues and often results in the fact that it is not the same individuals who are on cover.

At Team Meetings operational staff who face confrontation fully support the introduction of Security Industry Authority trained operatives.

CURRENT ASB POSITION

The last few weeks have seem similar issues to last year returning with gangs of young people frequenting the park and litter detritus from both drinking and use of recreational substances being on the increase. The Quarry remains a high patrol area for the Police.

Detached Youth Teams from both the Town Council and Shropshire Council have begun to engage with youth groups in the area.

Aggressive behaviour and vandalism remains a problem with damage to toilet doors, windows, the depot gates and thefts from the depot being reported in the last few weeks.

Over the last two Bank Holiday weekends reported levels of ASB have increased and it is envisaged as the weather begins to warm and the daylight hours extend issues could being to exacerbate, therefore finding a solution ahead of the Jubilee Bank Holiday is imperative.

DEVELOPMENT OF A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

The need to develop a partnership approach has become evident following recent Homelessness Taskforce Meetings and as a result the Town Clerk, Executive Director of the BID and Head of Environmental Maintenance were tasked to look at solutions. This work was delayed by the recent departure of the Head of Environmental Maintenance but both financial and operational commitment has been secured by the interim post holder.

The Town Clerk sought the view of all the operatives within the town centre to look at ways in which the need to cover outside core working hours could feasibly be achieved. Sickness absence amongst the workforce still continues particularly around staff falling ill with COVID and our continuing need to isolate those individuals for fear of large outbreaks amongst the workforce.

Stress-related absences were also raised by staff as was the low morale in having to constantly cover other teams' sickness absence and the continuing levels of abuse in high profile locations. This has been flagged by the Town Council's external Health & Safety advisor and subsequently raised at the Joint Consultative Committee.

Within the payroll budget an unfilled toilet operative post was highlighted as a way of deploying a different resource to focus on out of hours opening and monitoring allowing for facilities to be left open longer. This though was unlikely to provide the resource to meet last year's cover. It should be noted that security cover for 5 months cost £24k last year.

Discussions with the BID and Shropshire Council Partners have identified mutual outcomes in delivering a collaborative service maximising on economies of scale reaping the biggest benefit. A collective pot of £75k has been identified. Discussions have also taken place with the Shopping Centre Management and the Managers of the Museum both of which are witnessing ASB.

Added to this work is ongoing in developing a bid to the Home Office for Safer Streets 4 Funding expanding on the Ranger Initiative to look at how a later evening economy can be supported. Details of the Home Office funding are covered later in the Recreation & Leisure Committee Agenda.

IN-HOUSE OR CONTRACTED SERVICE

Whilst the Town Council operates a predominantly in-house operation, both the BID and Shropshire Council do not. In-house provides some level of flexibility but the need to cover work over a 7-day period does not allow for this kind of work to be easily accommodated, would require a team of staff to cover daily operations and does not provide flexibility for holiday and sickness absence.

This is the type of service that Councils frequently contract out thereby transferring the need for covering rotas outside of the organisation.

OPTIONS

There are a number of options which have been considered:

Do Nothing – The Town Council does not provide any additional cover and staff are tasked with closing facilities as lone workers. Senior Managers have already assessed the safety risk to staff of closing these facilities. Health & Safety advisers have suggested that staff double up on these activities. This places a strain on the workforce and managers are struggling to seek the necessary cover. Town Council staff have raised concerns over threats of violence and aggression towards them. It should be noted that this is a partnership approach and the BID and Shropshire Council are likely to pursue the Town Ranger Scheme solely in the town centre, not covering the Quarry should the Town Council not wish to collaborate. This poses a significant risk in town centre related ASB being merely displaced into the park.

Provide cover in-house – The Town Council is struggling to resource early evening cover, particularly when morale to cover this type of activity is very low. We have looked at creating a bigger warden team utilising the unfilled resource. However operational staff firmly believe that specialist SIA trained staff are required.

Appoint Security Contractors as last year – The provision of cover, bearing in mind the requirement for 2 security staff at any one time will mean that the unfilled budget resource is unlikely to meet an annual demand for service.

Partnership Approach – The development of economies of scale will mean that two security staff can be on duty at any one time but do not have to be joined at the hip. Providing there is a level of communication and support they can be working in different areas. The continuity of staffing means that understanding of issues and relationships can be built up.

TENDER PROCESS

A tender brief was developed detailing some of the key milestones, but for this type of service to work the need for the right provider to be appointed that will work with partners to develop the service is essential.

The key objectives of this project are

1. To be a pro-active and visible resource focussed on reducing anti-social behaviour and crime in Shrewsbury town centre and the Quarry Park.
2. To work closely with The Team Shrewsbury Partnership which includes West Mercia Police, Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, Shrewsbury BID, Shrewsbury Watch, and other partners to prevent crime and ASB, and to keep clear lines of communication open within all partners to ensure any town centre issues are addressed swiftly.
3. To contribute to the pro-active management of the public realm including support of town centre highway management.

Core Responsibilities

- Be a welcoming face in the town, helping visitors when required
- Enhance the customer experience by providing visible reassurance to customers, the public and member businesses
- Patrol areas of the Town Centre and Quarry Park engaging with users and visitors
- Work closely with all Team Shrewsbury Partners working within the town centre and participate in Team Shrewsbury meetings
- Act as the “eyes and ears” for partners reporting any environmental issues like litter, flytipping, graffiti and drugs paraphernalia thus enabling a more targeted approach to matters of issue and generating an interagency working policy to respond to the issues.
- Identify any hotspot areas of Threat Risk or Harm
- Maintain a heightened awareness of any other threats to the town centre, including terrorism and help to spread the awareness to other partners and stakeholders using existing government guidance and training

- Assist in the removal of minor littering and graffiti
- Make use of existing resources to combat crime and anti-social behaviour; including town centre CCTV, body worn cameras and the Shrewsbury Watch Radio Link
- Keep an accurate and usable log of incidents of crime or anti-social behaviour to be shared with partners including the police;
- Assist with the opening and closing of public conveniences and public places in the town centre and park;
- Put out (at 10am) and take in (at 4pm) road closure signage during the Town Centre pedestrianisation trial (and any permanent continuance) on Saturdays and Sundays;
- To help the town prepare for the introduction of a protect duty on publicly accessible locations

Other general responsibilities

- Help to develop a culture of “Help you to help yourself” local resilience in the business and residential community;
- Ensure all required admin is accurate and appropriate;
- Promote safety initiatives to businesses including Shrewsbury Watch;
- Maintain confidentiality in all aspects of work (Rangers will be required to sign confidentiality agreements);
- Communicate effectively with colleagues, managers, and other professionals, both in writing and verbally, building rapport and trust;
- Ensure all critical issues are reported ASAP;
- Be a reassuring support to businesses, the public, and partners;
- Keeping up to date with the crime statistics and trends in the area including shoplifting, ASB and other forms of general disorder etc

CLOSE OF TENDER

Tenders closed on 29th April. An update of submissions will be provided ahead of the Recreation & Leisure Committee Meeting.

This is a Tender Proposals, whilst being led by the Town Council’s Projects Manager, is a joint tender between the Town Council, Shropshire Council and the BID with the BID being the financial lead.

POST AWARD OF TENDER

Whilst some detail has been put into the tender award, the success of this project is down to the development of a strong partnership between the Town Council, Shropshire Council and the BID and the successful tenderer. This is seen as a Team Shrewsbury Partnership approach, working with other partners to ensure the maximum benefit.

It is envisaged that security staff will patrol with the PCSOs, The Ark Homeless Outreach Street Triage Team and Detached Youth Workers to really understand the issues and look at solutions to address the issues rather than just move the problem on.

The winning tenderer will be required to risk assess the town centre and Quarry Park to determine any vulnerabilities and suggest mitigation to reduce those vulnerabilities. Reference has also been made in the tender document for the need to ensure any ASB isn't merely displaced elsewhere.

There will however continue to be key milestone events that will have to be fulfilled and in the Town Council's case closing facilities later on in the early evening than currently.

Clear governance arrangements will be established with a clear point of contact. It is hoped that similar reporting mechanisms to last year can be developed with the successful tenderer.

The need to operationalise this project ahead of the Jubilee weekend is paramount.

FINANCIAL OPTIONS

The RFO has provided a financial appraisal of the options

Security cover for the park between April-August cost £24k charged out at £15.50 per hour regardless of day.

The cost of an operative (including all on-costs) is £14.89 [plain time] £22.34 [1.5 x overtime - weekdays] and £29.78 [2x overtime – weekends and Bank Holidays]

For the level of hours required and the timeframe for those required hours, it makes business sense to contract this service out and abrogate the requirements for staffing rotas outside of the organisation.

In addition to staffing costs there are other things to consider:

- Since the start of the year there have been a number of vandalism issues in the park to both sets of toilets and the depot which have resulted in further Repair and Maintenance as well as staff time in attending to repairs
- There has been a significant amount of senior management time looking at staffing rotas as well as staff welfare time and time spent writing victim impact statements for issues
- There has been a large amount of staff sickness not just for routine staff sickness and COVID issues that have had an impact on staffing levels but also for stress in dealing with very difficult matters in the area

RISK OPTIONS

Do Nothing

- Given the identified risk to public and staff this isn't an option

In House Cover

- Cover would be costed at the above rates
- There is no guarantee of staff availability, particularly in view of the increased staff absence due to COVID and the increasing threat of abuse and violence

Contacting Solely in the Quarry

- Charge out rate of at least £31.00 per hour based on the requirement to have 2 members of staff
- This will not address the problem and has the risk of merely displacing the problem

Partnership

- Economies of scale provides for greater cover
- Working with partners can look at addressing the problems rather than merely reacting to the issues

General Issues

- ***The Quarry and the Town Centre continues to be the town's hotspot areas and the demands for service and support remains high in this area.***
- The incidents of staff being abused and assaulted in the town centre is high and the morale in wanting to work in these areas is at a low
- The Quarry is the Town Council's Jewel in the Crown. It is the most visited facility in the town and the need for people to feel safe is paramount
- There was much residential concern about the levels of ASB in the town centre and the park and since the suggestion of Town Rangers has been in the public domain, many have contacted both the Town Council and the BID about their relief that a similar role will be developed for this summer
- The BID has polled its levy payers and there is overwhelming support for this project.

AUTHORITY TO PROCEED

- The Town Clerk continues to have a blanket delegated authority to discharge the functions of the Council given that the Council wished to continue with virtual meetings
- The Town Clerk has the authority to exercise the functions of the Council's Head of Paid Service
- The Town Clerk has the authority to manage Council staffing in accordance with Council's Policies, Procedures & Budgets
- The Head of Operations has authority to appoint temporary employees as and when required within the budget estimates
- The Head of Operations has authority to approve the payment of overtime

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) That the Report be noted
- (ii) That Officer proceed with the development of the Town Ranger Scheme in conjunction with partners